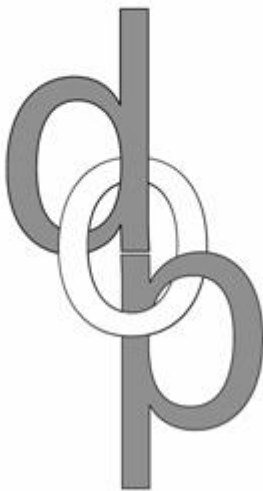


# STONINGTON

Department of Planning

DEPARTMENT ACTIVITY REPORT  
FISCAL YEAR 2006-2007



## OVERVIEW

During this past fiscal year, the Department of Planning has completed our evolution as a charter specified organizational unit within the general government. The Department provides a multitude of support services for the community which range from permitting to actual project implementation, and is responsible for administration and enforcement of the Zoning, Inland Wetland and Watercourse, and the Subdivision Regulations. The Department works with other agencies to assess community needs, design sensitive solutions, and exerts ourselves to obtain funding to improve the quality of life within the community.

The Department is organized into three divisions: Planning/Land Use; Zoning Compliance; and Economic/Community Development. In addition, the Department provides technical assistance to town regulatory land use agencies including the Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC), the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA), the Inland Wetlands & Watercourses Commission (IWWC), and the Conservation Commission.

### *Planning/Land Use*

The Department of Planning serves a *planning* function in the community as well. We remain highly energized about the Plan of Conservation and Development adopted in 2004, and work to implement the *Policies* and *Action Items* contained within the document. This plan has provided the Department, and several town agencies with a manual for preserving the quality of life and enhancing the economic viability of the community. This organizational unit focuses on staff support to the Inland Wetland and Watercourse Commission, Planning and Zoning Commission and Conservation Commission.

### *Zoning Enforcement*

Efforts to expand enforcement of the regulations have been successful over the past year. The Department worked with the administration to enhance the enforcement team without creating new staff positions. This enhancement has enabled the Department to become more responsive to complaints, and to perform the long-term follow-through that is required to ensure compliance. This organizational unit focuses on staff support to the Planning and Zoning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals.

### *Community Development*

Grant activity remains harried. Historically the Department has been very successful in acquiring grant funding, and in actuality, too successful. This success has not waned; however, the Department has taken an alternative approach. Past awards resulted in staffing shortages for other

#### Staff Support provided to:

- Planning and Zoning Commission
- Inland Wetland and Watercourses Commission
- Zoning Board of Appeals
- Conservation Commission
- POCD Implementation Committee
- Stormwater Task Force

Department initiatives, and severely impacted normal operating responsibilities. The Department has been in search of an organizational mechanism to assist the community in evaluating the costs and benefits of receiving grant funds. Regardless, the Department has adopted a policy that limits the pursuit of grant funding to projects that have already been the subject of planning efforts.

## TURNOVER

There is an area of difficulty that remains for the Department, specifically the ability to maintain quality staff. Since 2002, the Department has witnessed the following turnover:

### *Director of Planning (3)*

Mary Villa → Barbara Blycker → **Jason Vincent**

### *Planner (4)*

Barbara Blycker → Jason Vincent → Elizabeth Rasmussen → **Keith Brynes**

### *PZC Admin (3)*

Kathy Tallardy → Gail Hantman → **Gayle Phoenix**

### *IWWC/ZBA Admin (5)*

Teresa Post → Jennifer Bonville → Rachelle Barron → Lourdes Dyer → **Carol Caron**

### *Community Development Admin (3)*

Gail Hantman → Denise Collard → **Vacant**

### *Wetland Agent (2)*

Ed Piver → **Candy Palmer**

It continues to be difficult to provide a consistent customer service level, mainly because the Department deals with a complex regulatory environment that requires significant training to understand. Ms. Carol Caron recently joined the Department and was one of three people to serve in the IWWC/ZBA Admin post during the fiscal year.

As mentioned in previous reports, the community will need to address a long-term solution to employee turnover within this Department. The Department has taken steps to increase revenue to decrease our reliance on property taxes to fund the operations; however, the volume of work, complexity of the regulations, and the customer service requirements makes it difficult for performance to meet the objectives. There are real costs of turnover that need to be evaluated when staff salaries or benefits are being discussed.

### Current Staff Tenure:

	YEARS
<b>Joseph Larkin</b>	14
<b>Jason Vincent</b>	4
<b>Gayle Phoenix</b>	3
<b>Keith Brynes</b>	1.5
<b>Mark Comeau</b>	1.5
<b>Carol Caron</b>	.75

## HIGHLIGHTS OF CURRENT ACTIVITIES

### COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Town has been awarded grant money from various funding sources to improve community infrastructure. The Department is responsible for the management and implementation of these projects, which include:

1. \$2,176,000 from the Federal Highway Administration (FHA) Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) Program, funding for streetscape improvements in Pawcatuck;
2. \$350,000 from the from the Federal Highway Administration (FHA) Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) Program, funding for improvements at the intersection of U.S. Route 1 and CT Route 2 in Pawcatuck;
3. \$1,024,000 from the Federal Highway Administration (FHA) Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) Program, funding for streetscape improvements in Downtown Mystic;
4. \$50,000 from the Federal Highway Administration (FHA) Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) Program, funding for a Transportation Study in Mystic;
5. \$150,000 from the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program Income Fund for the Pawcatuck River Pedestrian Bridge;
6. \$50,000 from the Recreational Trails Program (RTP) for the Pawcatuck River Valley Greenway;
7. \$175,000 from the Connecticut Small Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP) for the Town Dock South Pier Extension;
8. \$175,000 from the Connecticut Small Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP) for the Exit 90 intermodal connections project.

#### *New grants:*

1. \$2,076,000 SAFTEA grant for improvements at Exit 90 in Mystic.
2. \$500,000 federal transportation earmark for a transportation study at Mystic Seaport.
3. \$346,500 HUD EDI grant for the south pier extension project at the Town Dock.
4. \$500,000 STEAP grant for the Pawcatuck Park Dock project.

With the assistance of other Town Departments, the following projects have been completed:

1. \$25,000 from the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection Long Island Sound License Plate Fund for the Mystic Dinghy Dock.
2. \$100,000 roof replacement at Edith K. Richmond Homes.

#### Grant Activity

Active Grants  
**\$7,572,000**

Completed Projects  
**\$125,000**

Pending Applications  
**\$900,000**

*Ongoing Projects:*

Pawcatuck Park Dock - \$400,000 to 500,000

Senior Center - \$750,000 to 900,000

Mystic Streetscape - \$1.1M

Pawcatuck Streetscape - \$2.5 Million

American Maritime Education and Research Center (A.M.E.R.C.) at the  
Mystic Seaport - \$1.5 Million

Mystic Transportation Study - \$50,000

Town Dock South Pier Extension - \$3 Million

Mystic Shuttle - \$150,000 to 200,000 annually

Mystic Wayfinding Program - \$50,000 to 100,000

## PLANNING

There are 150 Action Items identified in the Implementation Guide (Chapter 9) of the Stonington Plan of Conservation and Development:

- 37 are general policies; and
- 113 are tasks.

Not all action items are the responsibility of the Department of Planning, however, the Department tracks all activities

*Highlights of action items completed in FY 2005-2006:*

ITEM	PAGE	DESCRIPTION	COMPLETED
7	9-16	Address Space Needs at the Town Garage (DPW Project)	8/1/2005
Not Listed in POCD		Amendment to Future Land Use Plan (8-3) to change an area from Low Density Residential to Village Residential	8/16/2005
71 (2)	9-14	Encourage Age-Restricted housing where appropriate	Regulation Amendment Application was denied 5-0 by the Planning and Zoning Commission.
110 (5)	9-20	If feasible, connect the Mystic sewer system into the Groton sewer system	The Town of Groton is not interested.

*Action Item Summary:*

	Completed 7/2005 – 6/2006	Completed Prior to 7/2005	Total Items	Total Completed	Percent Complete
General Policy	0	2	37	2	5.4
Task	4	13 $\frac{1}{3}$	113	17 $\frac{1}{3}$	15.3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>13<math>\frac{1}{3}</math></b>	<b>150</b>	<b>19<math>\frac{1}{3}</math></b>	<b>12.9</b>

	Remaining	Active	% Active (Total)	% Active (Remaining)
General Policy	35	9	24.3	25.7
Task	95 $\frac{2}{3}$	16	14.2	16.7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>130<math>\frac{2}{3}</math></b>	<b>25</b>	<b>16.6</b>	<b>19.1</b>

## PERMITTING

Permitting takes up a significant amount of the Department's resources. Most permits are active for multiple years, and require a long-term commitment to ensure compliance with the authorized activity. The permitting activity for the current year is not an indicator of active permits. Many permits take several years for completion and require significant staff follow up.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006 <sup>1</sup>
Site Development Plans (PZC)	27	39	11	17	25	24	17
Subdivisions (PZC)	11	14	9	15	11	7	5
Special Use Permit <sup>2</sup> (PZC)	20	25	21	19	19	22	8
Regulation Amendments (PZC)	2	3	8	10	12	13	12
Zone Changes (PZC)	3	6	1	2	5	8	4
Coastal Area Management (PZC)	11	15	5	13	15	13	9
Groundwater Protection (PZC)	0	5	2	3	2	9	3
Bond Reduction (PZC)	3	4	5	1	6	6	3
Zoning Permit Applications	354	357	364	419	454	508	299
Zoning Variance (ZBA)	45	39	28	45	36	39	30
Inland Wetlands (IWWC)	16	27	23	31	55	42	35
<b>TOTAL APPLICATIONS</b>	<b>492</b>	<b>534</b>	<b>457</b>	<b>575</b>	<b>640</b>	<b>690</b>	<b>425</b>
Percent change from previous year	-	+8%	-14%	+25%	+11%	+8%	-

<sup>1</sup> As of August 31, 2006

<sup>2</sup> Includes Change of Non-conforming Use (2005 on)

PZC – Planning and Zoning Commission

ZBA – Zoning Board of Appeals

IWWC – Inland Wetland and Watercourses Commission

### Active Permitting:

	Number of Applications by 8/31:	TOTAL
2004	<b>452</b>	<b>640</b>
2005	<b>507</b>	<b>690</b>
2006	<b>425</b>	<b>?</b>

*Current pace is 16% slower than last year.*

*Calendar Year 2005 was the highest permit volume this Department has faced.*

**Overall permitting activity is up 40% from 2000.**

## ENFORCEMENT

### Enforcement Team

Wayne Greene  
Joseph Larkin  
Keith Brynes  
Candace Palmer  
Jason Vincent

*The Department of Planning has been informally working with the Building Official's Office as part of an effort to coordinate enforcement activities.*

*This team will become an integral part of the Department in the future*

Enforcement of the regulations has been a particular focus that the Department has continued to work on in 2006. As you will see in the activity report listed below, tracking complaints allows us to determine trends from year to year. The next objective is to track complaints on a month by month basis to determine where the sticking points are. In 2005 the Department investigated 205 allegations of violations (an increase from 57 for 2004). The Department has focused a significant amount of energy towards this task in an effort to increase public trust and ensure equitable treatment for all residents and property owners.

	2003	2004	2005	2006 <sup>1</sup>
Zoning Complaint	73	57	205	113
CDO – Zoning	3	6	9	1
Zoning Citation	7	8	5	12
Wetland Complaint	5	14	23	23
CDO - Wetlands	-	2	1	0
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>149</b>

<sup>1</sup> As of August 31, 2006  
CDO – Cease and Desist Order

Enforcement capability has been expanded through the combination of the Wetland Agent and Planning Intern positions into a part-time enforcement staff position. This combination has enable an increase in environmental permit compliance through documented site inspections and has positively impacted the Department's ability to keep up with the complaint volume. Historically, the Department has been criticized for poor performance in the administrative permit and enforcement component of the work.

The Department also created a Standard Zoning Enforcement Procedures guide to facilitate an even handed approach towards enforcement. While not all violations are equal and not all violators approach the problem with the same desire to solve it, the Department is working to ensure compliance in the most effective manner possible, recognizing that the courts are not always the correct problem-solving device.

The Department is now working to track complaints that have been forwarded to the courts for action. A particular sticking point involves the leniency of the courts to enforce orders that are made in favor of the town. Future reporting will highlight this weakness in the enforcement process.

## OBJECTIVES FOR THE UPCOMING YEAR

We have established idealistic goals that have real connections to the direction the Department is heading. These goals may not be easily achievable, but are critical in measuring our success over the next year.

- Implement the Plan of Conservation and Development;
- Develop a computerized version of the Zoning Map for use with the Geographic Information System (GIS);
- Revise the Zoning Regulations and Zoning Maps, as necessary.
- Continue working with the GIS Committee to implement a permit tracking software package;
- Enhance our ability to achieve customer satisfaction by improving communication and service delivery to citizens;
- Improve regulation enforcement;
- Develop Application Guidebooks for Zoning Amendment Applications;
- Develop a vision for Downtown Mystic;
- Complete the Open Space Plan with a Greenway component;
- Complete the dock at Pawcatuck Park;
- Work with the Mystic Chamber of Commerce to enhance the Trolley's presence in Mystic;
- Start the Pawcatuck Streetscape Project;
- Enhance digital archiving of permit data;
- Enhance web and electronic delivery of department information;
- Increase interagency cooperation in the planning process;

The Department is also involved in a number of outside activities, which requires interaction with the following organizations:

- Westerly-Pawcatuck Joint Development Task Force
- Greater Mystic Chamber of Commerce and Mystic Shuttle Committee
- Mystic Cooperative Task Group
- Multimodal Study
- I-95 Corridor Feasibility Study
- Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments
- Town of Groton Department of Planning and Development
- Town of Westerly Planning Department
- SouthEast Area Transit (SEAT)

***Implement the  
Plan of  
Conservation  
and  
Development***

***Improve  
regulation  
enforcement***

***Complete the  
Open Space  
Plan***

## DEPARTMENT STAFF

The Department consists of five Full Time Equivalent (FT) positions, and three Part Time Equivalent (PT) positions.

- **Jason Vincent**, AICP – Director of Planning
- **Joseph Larkin**, CZEO – Zoning Official
- **Keith Brynes**, AICP – Town Planner
- **Mark Comeau**, AIA – Community Development Specialist (PT)
- **Candace Palmer** – Zoning Enforcement Officer/Wetland Agent (PT)
- **Gayle Phoenix**, CZET – PZC and Zoning Permit Administrator
- **Carol Caron** – IWWC/ZBA Permit Administrator
- **Vacant** – Community Development Administrator (PT)

## TRAINING AND OTHER PARTICIPATION

- A particular source of Department pride is the recent obtainment of Certified Zoning Enforcement Technician (CZET) for Ms. Gayle Phoenix, who successfully completed that portion of the Connecticut Association of Zoning Enforcement Officer (CAZEO) training program. Ms. Phoenix is one of the first individuals in Connecticut to receive this recognition and is the first clerical staff person in the Department to have this level of training.
- Ms. Candace Palmer has completed the Connecticut Association of Zoning Enforcement Officer (CAZEO) training program, and is working towards her Certified Zoning Enforcement Officer (CZEO) recognition.
- Mr. Keith Brynes is currently enrolled in the Connecticut Association of Zoning Enforcement Officer (CAZEO) training program and the Connecticut Inland Wetland and Watercourse training program.
- Mr. Joe Larkin is a member of the Connecticut Association of Zoning Enforcement Officers (CAZEO) Executive Board
- Mr. Jason Vincent is a member of the Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association (CCAPA) Executive Committee